

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson*****Mark-Up of H.R. 5498, H.R. 5562, and H.R. 5105***

June 24, 2010 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee markup of H.R. 5498, H.R. 5562, and H.R. 5105:

“Today, after extensive Committee oversight, we are considering three important new pieces of legislation.

First, we take up H.R. 5498, “the WMD Prevention and Preparedness Act of 2010”. This legislation tackles the threat of a weapon of mass destruction attack from all angles. Two months ago, we heard compelling testimony from former Senators Bob Graham and Jim Talent, of the WMD Commission, about:

- the magnitude of the threat;
- the need for better intelligence and information sharing at all levels of government;
- the lack of strategy to address the bioterrorism threat; and
- the need for more robust individual and community preparedness programs.

Today, with the passage of H.R. 5498, we will be taking a major step forward on this unconventional emerging threat. Specifically, under this bill, we will, for the first time, direct the Federal government to focus its resources and capabilities, in a coordinated manner, to address the WMD threat.

Moreover, as introduced by Rep. Pascrell and Ranking Member King, H.R. 5498 put in place programs to effectively partner with the private sector – especially the laboratory community – to address one of the most vexing homeland security challenges—the bioterrorism threat.

I am proud of the bipartisan work that went into developing this comprehensive bill. The positive statements of the WMD Commission leaders are certainly an indication that we have the right approach.

The next bill under consideration today is H.R. 5562, the “Homeland Security Grant Management Improvement Act.”

As introduced by Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response Subcommittee Chairwoman Laura Richardson, H.R. 5562 is the product of extensive Committee oversight of FEMA’s administration of grant programs. It addresses three specific areas where State or urban areas have identified the need for enhancements.

First, it ensures consistent guidance to State and locals on how they can spend their grant dollars. Today, States or urban areas can be required by FEMA to use a specific percentage of its award for certain activities – even if those activities are outside of its FEMA-approved homeland security plan. Further, the bill requires FEMA to consider whether the current limits on “Management and Administration” reimbursements are appropriate.

Finally, H.R. 5562 directs FEMA to partner with the Department's Chief Financial Officer to complete a feasibility study on issuing multi-year program guidance for the homeland security grant program. Guidance for these grants changes considerably from year-to-year, making it difficult for States and urban areas to properly plan. Offering multi-year guidance could prove helpful to grantees as they plan activities and ensure that grant funds are spent quicker and more effectively.

The last bill under consideration today is H.R. 5105—a bill introduced by Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response Ranking Member Mike Rogers and Representative Kilroy, to establish a Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) at DHS. I strongly believe that the Department needs a CVO, especially given its statutory mission to research “high-consequence biological threats involving diseases transmitted from animals to humans” and its growing animal workforce—principally detection dogs.

Given the projected growth in canine detection programs and DHS' plans to transition the Plum Island research facility to a new facility, it is critical that we have a Chief Vet in place at DHS.

Collectively, these three bills address key oversight findings and make the nation more secure.

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